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# Liberian English

**Liberian English** refers to the varieties of English spoken in Liberia. There are five such varieties:

- Standard Liberian English or Liberian Settler English (similar to American English)
- Kru Pidgin English
- Liberian Kreyol language (Vernacular Liberian English) from African American Vernacular English
- Merico language (Americo-Liberian settlers from the United States of America)
- Caribbean English (ex-Caribbean slaves settlers from the Caribbean islands)

Normally, Liberians use these terms to refer to all such varieties simply as "English". Additionally, the term "Liberian English" is sometimes used for all varieties except the standard.

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## Standard Liberian English

Standard Liberian English is the language of those people whose African-American ancestors from the United States and the Caribbean islands immigrated to Liberia in the nineteenth century. It remains prevalent in Liberia due to political and economic ties to the United States that include trade and education that reinforce the importance of this variety. This variety is a transplanted variety of African American Vernacular English from the southern part of the United States. It is most distinctive in isolated settlements such as Louisiana, Lexington, and Bluntsville, small communities upriver from Greenville in Sinoe County. According to 1993 statistics, approximately 69,000 people, or 2.5% of the population, spoke Standard Liberian English as a first language. However, due to the other forms of English being prevalent throughout Liberia, each variety of language has an effect on the others, thereby creating common traits that extend beyond language variety.

The vowel system is more elaborate than in other West African variants; Standard Liberian English distinguishes [i] from [ɪ], and [u] from [ʊ], and uses the diphthongs [aɪ], [aʊ], and [əɪ]. Vowels can be nasalized. The final vowel of *happy* is [ɛ]. It favors open syllables, usually omitting syllable-final [t], [d], or a fricative. The interdental fricatives [θ, ð] appear as [t, d] in syllable-initial position (such as *thing* and *this* having respective pronunciations of *ting* and *dis*), and as [f, v] finally. The glottal fricative [h] is preserved, as is the voiceless labio-velar fricative [ʍ] (in such words as *whit* and *which* in contrast to voiced [w] in *wit*

and *wish*). Affricates have lost their stop component, thus [tʃ] > [ʃ]. Between vowels, [t] may be flapped (> [ɾ]) as in North American English. Liquids are lost at the end of words or before consonants, making Standard Liberian English a non-rhotic dialect.[1]

Additionally, Liberian English includes additional vocabulary and sounds at ends of words to represent the tone of statements that can differ.[2] The two most common examples that represent a good mood from the speaker are "o" and "ya." An example is "ya hello-o," which is a common way to greet someone or a group of people. On the other hand, adding "menh" to the end of a word can represent disappointment or frustration. Conversations frequently include many of these sounds mixed in to show mood in a way that often shown via voice inflection and tone by other English speakers.

## Kru Pidgin English

Kru Pidgin English is a moribund variety that was spoken historically by Krumen. These were individuals, most often from the Klao Bassa people and Grebo ethnic groups, who worked as sailors on ships along the West African coast and also as migrant workers and domestics in such British colonies as the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria. The Krumen tradition dates back to the end of the eighteenth century. With the end of the British colonial presence in West Africa in the mid-twentieth century, however, the tradition came to an end, and with it the ongoing use of Kru Pidgin English.

Kru Pidgin English is quite distinct from other forms of English in Liberia and has numerous unique traits. Plural marking, for instance, is done solely by the suffixal *-z*, while other variants will also integrate a postponed *den* as another plural marking form. Another feature of Kru Pidgin English, perhaps one of the most distinct, is the lack of tense-marking that even often extends to copulas in many cases. An example of the lack of tense marking is "he feel hot" instead of "he had felt hot." When it comes to other markers, Kru Pidgin English almost exclusively has *de* to mark aspect, such as in the statement "we de go na" in the place of "we had gone to."[3]

## Liberian Kreyol language

Liberian Kreyol language (Vernacular Liberian English), or Liberian creole the most common variety, developed from Liberian Interior Pidgin English, the Liberian version of West African Pidgin English though it has been significantly influenced by the Americo-Liberian and the Caribbean slaves Settler English. Its phonology owes much to Liberia's Kru languages. Vernacular Liberian English has been analysed having a post-creole continuum. As such, rather than being a pidgin wholly distinct from English, it is a range of varieties that extend from the Caribbean English to the highly pidginized Americo-Liberian English and African American Vernacular English to one that shows many similarities to English as spoken elsewhere in West Africa.

## Role of English in Liberia

Since many settlers brought English into Liberia and established the language as a primary mode of communication across different groups in the country, English continues to play a crucial role in understanding the cultural development of the country. At first, many ethnic groups started to learn English due to potential economic benefits and a desire to become literate in yet another language in addition to the many tribal languages already spoken. The economic benefits of English were evident, as the language became crucial for trade with Europeans and later Americans. Even the Liberian Department of Education adopted a policy to provide education in English despite not having similar rules for any indigenous language.

Over the course of Liberia's history, English has been central to the assessment of the overall development of the country. Multiple individuals and groups have committed to raising English literacy rates to represent a larger national commitment to economic and social progress. One adverse effect of these attempts is that, while knowledge of English did spread across the country and did establish the known varieties, there became a stigma to speaking in local languages.

To understand the prevalence of English, one 1999 study found that of Liberian immigrants across the United States, nearly 73 percent spoke English at home, and many children just spoke English instead of their parents' language.[4] There are a few reasons attributed to this trend. Two main reasons are intertribal marriages inspiring people across tribes to have a common way to communicate and parents wanting their children to be proficient in English, especially those parents who are educated themselves. There are currently some pushing for native languages to be taught in schools as a way to preserve the culture, but these tribes do continue to have their own impact on how English is spoken across the country.

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# External links

- Liberian Kreyol ("Liberian English") video on Wikitongues (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y76c6UqN0dc)

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